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FAMILIAR
EXPLANATION
OF THE SERVICE OF
CONFIRMATION.

PRICE THREEPENCE.

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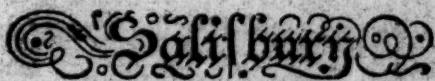
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FAMILIAR
EXPLANATION
OF THE SERVICE OF
CONFIRMATION,
USED BY THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND,
ABRIDGED FROM *K*
ARCHBISHOP SECKER'S SERMON
ON CONFIRMATION.

SECOND EDITION.

BY WILLIAM COXE,
RECTOR OF BEMERTON,
AND DOMESTIC CHAPLAIN TO JOHN, LORD
BISHOP OF SALISBURY.



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T H E
O R D E R O F C O N F I R M A T I O N ,

Or laying on of Hands upon those that are baptized, and come to Years of discretion.

¶ *Upon the Day appointed, all that are to be then confirmed, being placed, and standing in Order before the Bishop; he (or some other Minister appointed by him) shall read this Preface following.*

TO the end that Confirmation may be ministered to the more edifying of such as shall receive it, the Church hath thought good to order, that none hereafter shall be confirmed, but such as can say the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, and can also answer to such other questions as in the short Catechism are contained; which order is very convenient to be observed, to the end, that children being now

come to the years of discretion, and having learned what their godfathers and godmothers promised for them in baptism, they may themselves with their own mouth and consent openly before the church ratify and confirm the same; and also promise, that by the grace of God they will evermore endeavour themselves faithfully to observe such things as they by their own confession have assented unto.

R E M A R K S.

This Preface simply and plainly orders, that all persons who intend to be confirmed, must

be able to say the Catechism of the church of England, understand the Promises which their godfathers and godmothers made in their names at their baptism, and solemnly resolve to fulfil those Promises.

Prayers may be offered up for infants with very good effect. Promises may be made in their name by such as are authorised to act for them: especially when the things promised are for their interest, and will be their duty; which is the case of those promises made in baptism. But no persons ought to make promises for themselves, till they well understand the nature of those promises, and are capable of forming serious resolutions. Therefore, in the present case, being able to say the words of the catechism is by no means enough, without a competent knowledge of their meaning, and an intention of behaving as it requires them.

Therefore neither ministers or parents ought to be too eager for bringing children very early to confirmation: they should first teach them to know their duty sufficiently, and resolve upon the practice of it heartily; then introduce them to this ordinance. But since it happens too frequently, that persons were not able, or have neglected, to apply for confirmation: so whenever they apply, as by doing it they express a desire

desire to *fulfil all righteousness**; and may certainly receive benefit, both from the profession and the prayers, appointed in the service; they should not be rejected, but encouraged.

Only I must entreat you to observe, that when you take thus on yourselves the engagement of leading a christian life, you are to take it once for all; and no more think of ever being confirmed a second time, than of being baptized a second time.

¶ Then shall the Bishop say,

Do ye here in the presence of God, and of this congregation, renew the solemn promise and vow that was made at your Baptism; ratifying and confirming the same in your own persons, and ac-	knowledging yourselves bound to believe, and to do all those things which your godfathers and godmothers then undertook for you. And every one shall audibly answer, I do.
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Now the things promised in your name were, to renounce whatever God hath forbidden, to believe what he hath taught, and to practise what he hath commanded. Nobody can promise for infants absolutely, that they shall do these things;

* Matth. iii. 15.

but only, that they shall be instructed and admonished to do them; and it is hoped, not in vain.

If no promises had been made in your name by your godfathers and godmothers at your baptism, you would still have been bound, as soon as you are capable of knowing your duty, to believe in God, and to obey his commandments. But you are more early and firmly bound to believe in God and to obey his commandments, not only because your godfathers and godmothers promised that you should do so, but because care has been taken to make you sensible of your obligation to believe in God and to obey his commandments; and this obligation all persons are called upon in the question proposed by the Bishop, to ratify and acknowledge. And great cause have you to answer *I do*; for doing it is a duty, on which your eternal happiness depends.

Our first parents, even while they were innocent, had no title to happiness, or to existence, but from God's good pleasure; and as their existence and happiness were conditional, that is, depended on their due obedience to God's commands; when they fell, and disobeyed those commands, they lost all title to existence and happiness, and communicated to us a corrupt
and

and mortal nature. This bad condition we fall not, from our first use of reason, to make worse, in a greater or less degree, by actual transgressions; and so personally deserve the displeasure, instead of favour of God, who made us. Yet we may hope, that, as God is good, he will on our repentance forgive us. But then, as God is also just and wise, and the ruler of the world; we could never know with certainty, what his justice and wisdom, and the honour of his government might require of him with respect to sinners: whether he would pardon heinous offences; and whether he would reward those whom he might be pleased not to punish. But most happily the gospel has cleared up all these doubts of unassisted reason: by offering to the worst of sinners, on the condition of faith in Christ, added to repentance, and productive of good works, a covenant of pardon for sins past, assistance against sin for the future, and eternal life in return for a sincere, though imperfect obedience.

The method of entering into this covenant is, by being baptized, according to the command* of our blessed Saviour himself, *in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost*. In this appointment of baptism, the washing with water

* St. Matthew xxviii. 19.

aptly signifies, both our promise to preserve ourselves, with the best care we can, pure from the defilement of sin, and God's promise to consider us, as free from the guilt of sin. Baptism then, through his mercy, secures infants from the bad consequences of *Adam's* transgression, by giving them a new title to the immortality, which he lost. It also secures, to persons grown up, the entire forgiveness of their own transgressions, on the terms of belief, repentance, and obedience. But then, in order to receive these benefits, we must lay our claim to the gospel covenant, which conveys them: we must ratify, as soon as we are able, what was promised in our name by our godfathers and godmothers, before we were able to promise by ourselves. For if we neglect, and renounce our part of the gospel covenant, we have plainly not the least right to hope that God will perform his part: but we remain in our sins; and, unless we return from the unrighteousness of our ways, *Christ shall profit us nothing.**

You see then of what unspeakable importance it is, that we take on ourselves the vow of our baptism. And it is very fit and useful, that we should take it in such form and manner as the

* 2 Gal. v. 2.

service prescribes. It is fit, that when persons have been properly instructed, by the care of their parents, friends, and ministers, they should with joyful gratitude acknowledge them to have faithfully performed that kindest duty. It is fit, that before they are admitted by the church of Christ to the holy communion, they should give public assurance to the church of their christian belief, and christian purposes. This ceremony may also be extremely useful to themselves. For consider: young persons are just entering into a world of temptations, with no experience, and little knowledge to guard them; and much youthful rashness to expose them. The authority of others over them is beginning to lessen, their own passions to increase, *evil communication* to have great opportunities of *corrupting good manners**; and strong impressions, of one kind or another, will be made on them very soon. What can then be more necessary, or more likely to preserve their innocence, than to form the most deliberate resolutions of acting right; and to declare them in a manner, thus adapted to move them at the time, and be remembered by them afterwards: in the presence of God, of a number of his ministers, and of a large congre-

* 1 Cor. xv. 33.

gation of his people, assembled with more than usual solemnity for that very purpose?

But then you, who are to be confirmed, must either do your own part, or the whole of this preparation will be utterly thrown away upon you. If you make the answer, which is directed, without sincerity, it is lying to God: if you make it without attention, it is trifling with him. Watch over your hearts therefore, and let them go along with your lips. The two short words, *I do*, are soon said: but they comprehend much in them. Whoever uses them on this occasion, says in effect as follows: “ *I do* “ heartily renounce all the unlawful pleasures “ of the world; all the immoral gratifications of “ the flesh. *I do* sincerely believe, and will “ constantly profess, all the articles of the “ christian faith. *I do* firmly resolve to keep “ all God’s commandments all the days of my “ life; to love and honour him; to pray to “ him, and to praise him daily in private; to at- “ tend conscientiously on the public worship “ and instruction, which he hath appointed; “ to approach his holy table; to submit to his “ blessed will meekly and patiently in all things; “ to set him ever before my eyes, and acknow- “ ledge him in all my ways. *I do* further re- “ solve

“ solve, in the whole course of my behaviour
 “ amongst my fellow-creatures, to *do justly, love*
 “ *mercy**, speak truth, be diligent and useful in
 “ my station, dutiful to my superiors, con-
 “ descending to those beneath me, friendly to
 “ my equals; and to *do unto all men, as I would*
 “ *they should do unto me†*. Further, *I do* resolve,
 “ in the government of myself, to be modest,
 “ sober, temperate, mild, humble, contented;
 “ to restrain every passion and appetite within
 “ due bounds; and to set my heart chiefly, not
 “ on the sensual enjoyments of this transitory
 “ world, but on the spiritual and eternal happi-
 “ ness of the world to come. Lastly, *I do* re-
 “ solve, whenever I fail in any of these duties,
 “ as I am sensible I have, and must fear I shall,
 “ to confess it before God with unfeigned con-
 “ cern, to apply for his promised pardon in the
 “ name of his blessed son, to beg the promised
 “ assistance of his holy spirit; and through his
 “ grace to watch over my steps with redoubled
 “ care.”

Observe then: it is not gloominess and me-
 lancholy, which religion enjoins; it is not use-
 less austerity, and abstinence from things lawful
 and safe; it is not extravagant flights and rap-

* Mic. vi. 8.

† See Luke vi. 31.

tures; it is not unmeaning or merely outward forms and ceremonies; much less is it bitterness against those who differ from you. But the practical and substantial duties are the things to which you bind yourselves, when you pronounce the awful words, *I do*. Utter them then with the truest seriousness: and say to yourselves, each of you, afterwards, as *Moses* did to the *Jews*, *thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, to walk in his ways and keep his statutes, and to hearken to his voice: and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his; that thou shouldst keep all his commandments, and be holy unto the Lord thy God, as he hath spoken**. It is a certain truth, call it therefore often to mind, and fix it in your souls, that if breaking a solemn promise to men is a sin; breaking that, which you make thus deliberately to God, would be unspeakably a greater sin.

But let us now proceed to the next part of the service: in which after you have acknowledged and ratified the vow of your baptism, prayers are offered up, that God would *confirm* and strengthen you in your good purpose: on which account this appointment is called *confirmation*.

Scripture teaches, and sad experience proves, that of *ourselves we can do nothing; are not suffi-*

* Deut. xxvi. 17, 18, 19.

*cient** for the discharge of our duty, without God's continual aid: at the same time you must not forget, that God has promised to give his grace to those who serve him faithfully, and strive to deserve it by obeying his commands. To unite christians together, and incline them more to assemble for public worship, our blessed redeemer hath especially promised, that *where two or three of them are gathered together in his name, he will be in the midst of them†*. And further still, to promote a due regard in his people to their teachers and rulers, the sacred writings ascribe a peculiar efficacy to their praying over those who are committed to their charge. Even under the Jewish dispensation, the family of *Aaron* were told that *them the Lord had separated to minister unto him, and to bless in the name of the Lord‡: and they shall put my name, saith God, upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them§*. No wonder then, if under the christian dispensation we read, “*Now when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that (the new baptised converts of) Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John, who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that*

* John xv. 5—2 Cor. iii. 5.

† Matth. xviii. 20.

‡ Deut. x. 8. xxi. 5.

§ Numb. vi. 27.

“*they*

“ they might receive the Holy Ghost; then laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.*

Therefore, in compliance with these great authorities, here is, on the present occasion, a number of young disciples, about to run the same common race, met together to pray for themselves and one another; here is a number of elder christians, who have experienced the dangers of life, met to pray for those who are just entering into life; here are also God's Ministers, purposely come, to intercede with him in their behalf; and surely we may hope, that their joint and fervent petitions will avail, and be effectual.

The Bishop,

OUR help is in the name of the Lord;	Ans. Henceforth, world without end.
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Answer. Who hath made heaven and earth.	Bishop. Lord, hear our prayers;
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Bishop. Blessed be the name of the Lord.	Ans. And let our cry come unto thee.
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They begin, as they ought, with acknowledging in the words of scripture; *our help is in the name of the Lord, who hath made heaven and earth*; in gratitude to God's mercy for bestowing the grace which we require, they add, *Blessed be the name of the Lord, henceforth world without*

* Acts viii. 14, 15, 170.

end, and lastly, in confidence of his goodness, they intreat him, Lord bear our prayers and let our cry come unto thee.

Bishop. Let us pray.

ALMIGHTY and everliving God, who hast vouchsafed to regenerate these thy servants by water and the Holy Ghost, and hast given unto them forgiveness of all their sins; strengthen them, we beseech thee, O Lord, with the Holy Ghost the Comforter,	and daily increase in them thy manifold gifts of grace; the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength, the spirit of knowledge and true godliness; and fill them, O Lord, with the spirit of thy holy fear, now and for ever. <i>Amen.</i>
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By these words are meant, that all christians who are the *servants* of God in Christ, are entitled by baptism, to receive the grace of the holy spirit, and the benefits of the christian covenant, which is called in scripture *regeneration* or newness of life; in which God will consider them, while they keep their engagements, with peculiar love as his dear children. When it is added, that he *hath given unto them forgiveness of sins*, it means, that he hath given them assurance of *forgiveness* on the gracious terms of the gospel. But let no persons misunderstand this expression in the service, so as to delude themselves with a fatal
imagina-

imagination, that any thing said over them, can possibly convey to them a pardon of sins for which they are not truly penitent, and which they do not intend to forsake. When the Bishop continues *strengthen them O Lord with the Holy Ghost the comforter, he requests God to strengthen them* against all temptations, and supports them under all afflictions *by the Holy Ghost the comforter*: he concludes this prayer with some petitions for an increase of God's mercy. The meaning of which is to confer on them *a spirit of wisdom* to aim at the right end, the salvation of their souls, and of *understanding* to pursue it by right means: of *counsel* to form good purposes: and of *ghostly* or spiritual *strength*, to execute them; of *useful knowledge* in the doctrines of religion, and *true godliness*, disposing them to a proper use of their religious knowledge, that they may join faith and good works, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance; but chiefly, though lastly, that they may be *filled with the spirit of God's holy fear*: with that awful reverence of him, as the greatest and purest and best of beings; which will effectually excite to whatever they are concerned to believe or do, for *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom**.

* Psal. cxi. 10.

Having concluded this prayer for them all in general, the bishop lays his hands on each of their heads, and then implores for them the divine protection and care in the following words:

¶ Then all of them in order kneeling before the Bishop, he shall lay his hand upon the head of every one severally, saying,

DEFEND, O Lord, this thy Child (<i>or this thy servant</i>) with thy heavenly grace, that <i>he</i> may continue thine for ever, and daily increase in thy Holy Spirit more and more, until <i>he</i> come	unto thy everlasting kingdom. <i>Amen.</i> <i>Then shall the Bishop say,</i> The Lord be with you. <i>Ans.</i> And with thy Spirit.
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The ceremony of laying on of hands has been used from the earliest ages, by religious persons, when they prayed for God's blessing on any one; used by our Saviour, who, when *children were brought to him, that he should put his hands on them, and pray, and bless them, was much displeased** with those who forbad it; used by the Apostles, after converts were baptized†; reckoned in the Epistle to the *Hebrews* as a part of the foundation of the christian profession‡; constantly practised,

* Matth. xix. 13, 15.—Mark x. 13, 16.

† See Acts xix.

‡ Heb. vi. 1.

and highly esteemed in the church from that time to this.

The laying on of the hand naturally expresses good will and good wishes in the person who doth it; and in the present case is further intended, as you will find in one of the following prayers, to *certify these*, to whom it is done, of *God's favour and gracious goodness towards them*: of which goodness they will continually feel the effects, provided, which must always be understood, that they preserve their title to his care by a due obedience to his laws. This, it must be owned, is a truth: and it may as innocently be signified by this sign as by any other, or as by any words to the same purpose. Further efficacy is not to be ascribed to it: nor are you to consider bishops, as having or claiming a power, in any case, to confer blessings arbitrarily on whom they please; but only as petitioning God for that blessing from above which he alone can give. Not that you are to expect, on the performance of this good office, any sudden and sensible change in your hearts, giving you, at once, a remarkable strength or comfort in piety, which you never felt before. But you may reasonably promise yourselves, from going through it with a proper disposition, greater measures, when real occasion requires them, of such divine assistance

assistance as will be needful for your support and orderly growth in every virtue of a christian life.

The laying on of hands being finished, the bishop and congregation mutually recommend each other to God, and return to such joint and public devotions as are suitable to the solemnity. The first of these is the Lord's Prayer: a form seasonable always, but peculiarly now; as every petition in it will shew to every one who considers it.

¶ And (all kneeling down) the Bishop shall add,
Let us Pray.

OUR Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven: give us this day our daily bread;	and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. <i>Amen.</i>
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In the next place, more especial supplications are poured forth, for the persons particularly concerned, to him who alone can enable them *both to will and to do what is good.*

And this Collect.

ALMIGHTY and everliving God, who makest us both to will and to do those things	that be good and acceptable unto thy divine majesty; we make our humble supplications unto
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unto thee for these thy servants, upon whom (after the example of thy holy Apostles) we have now laid our hands to certify them (by this sign) of thy favour and gracious goodness towards them. Let thy fatherly hand, we beseech thee, ever be over them; let thy holy spirit ever be with them; and so lead them in the knowledge and obedience of thy word, that in the end they may obtain everlasting life, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who with thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth ever one God world without end. *Amen.*

This petition is followed by a more general prayer for them and the rest of the congregation.

O ALMIGHTY and Everlasting God, vouchsafe, we beseech thee, to direct, sanctify, and govern both our hearts and bodies in the ways of thy laws, and in the works of thy commandments; that through thy most mighty protection, both here and ever, we may be preserved in body and soul through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

¶ Then the Bishop shall bless them, saying thus,

THE blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Ghost be upon you and remain with you for ever. *Amen.*

This blessing will certainly abide with you, unless, by wilful sin or gross negligence, you reject or abuse it. And in that case, you must not hope, that your baptism, or your confirmation,

tion, or the prayers of the bishop, or the church, or the whole world, will do you any service. Nothing but repentance through the merits of Jesus Christ, and forsaking your sins, will be of any service to deliver you from the punishment due to your sins: On your own care and attention your future happiness or misery, both in this life and the world to come, depends.

Not that, with our best care, we can avoid smaller faults; and if we intreat pardon for them in our daily prayers, and faithfully strive against them, we are assured, that they will be forgiven. But gross and habitual sins we may, through God's help, avoid; and if we fall into them, we forfeit our title to salvation at the same time. Yet even then our case is not desperate: and let us not make it so, by thinking it is: for, through the grace of the gospel, we may still repent and amend, and then be forgiven. But I beg you to observe, that, as continued health is vastly preferable to the happiest recovery from sickness; so is innocence to be preferred to the truest repentance. If we suffer ourselves to transgress our duty; God knows whether we shall have time to repent: God knows whether we shall have a heart to amend. At best we shall have lost, and more than lost, the whole time that we have been going back: whereas we have all
need

need to press forwards as fast as we can. Therefore let the innocent of wilful sin preserve that treasure with the greatest circumspection; and let sinners return from their errors without delay. Let the young enter upon the way of righteousness with hearty resolution; and those of riper age persevere in it to the end. In a word, let us all, of every age, seriously consider, and faithfully practise, the obligations of religion. For *the vows of God are still upon us**, how long soever it be since they were first made, either by us, or for us: and it is in vain to forget what God will assuredly remember; or hope to be safe in neglecting what he expects us to do. But let us use proper diligence; and he will infallibly give us proper assistance, and *confirm us all unto the end, that we may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ†*.

Now unto him, who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen‡.

* Psal. lvi. 12. † 1 Cor. i. 8. ‡ Jude 24, 25.

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